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**Contact:** Lisa Linowes

**Phone:** 603.838.6588

**Email:** [info@saverightwhales.org](mailto:info@saverightwhales.org)

## **WHALE CONSERVATION GROUP CALLS ON NOAA TO HALT ALL OFFSHORE WIND SONAR SURVEYS AFTER DISCOVERING MITIGATIONS ARE INEFFECTIVE**

Report finds marine mammals are being exposed to much louder noise levels than NOAA has stated which could be the cause for whale deaths

**September 11, 2023** – An investigation into recent whale deaths in the Atlantic has found that the noise produced by offshore wind sonar activities is much louder than NOAA Fisheries’ National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reported. Consequently, the setback distances adopted by NMFS to protect ocean life from the noise are too short and place whales and other marine mammals at a high risk of encountering harmful levels.

The Save Right Whales Coalition (SRWC), a group of long-time environmental activists dedicated to protecting the critically-endangered North Atlantic right whale from the industrialization of its ocean habitat, issued [this letter to NOAA Administrator Richard Spinrad](#) exposing the problem. According to the letter, “inadequate mitigations during a sonar survey could result in marine mammals experiencing sound levels that may injure or kill.” Since the only mitigation for sonar noise is distance, the shortened distances enforced by NMFS have “rendered any expected mitigations useless.”

SRWC’s finding is supported by a sound study conducted by Rand Acoustics, LLC, a leading acoustics firm in Maine. Earlier this year, Rand captured actual high decibel noise levels at a wind survey site approximately 43 nautical miles east of Barnegat Light, NJ. Rand found that the frequency and sound power levels he recorded did not match the equipment NMFS and the project sponsor said would be used. Rand’s data show the noise emitted from the sonar was much louder. This finding prompted a comprehensive review of the incidental harassment authorizations (IHAs) issued by NMFS which revealed a regular pattern of NMFS applying mitigations based on quieter sonar devices than those actually in use.

“In our review, we found that NMFS simply accepted the sonar sound levels provided by the wind developers without independently validating these levels,” said Lisa Linowes, a co-founder of SRWC. She warned that all mitigations relating to sonar noise in the IHAs are predicated on the loudness

of the sonar devices. Underestimating the actual noise level of sonar used by survey boats would lead to the specification of shorter 'safe' distances from marine mammals than were necessary for their protection. The setback distances also play a key role in calculating the number of marine mammal 'takes' NMFS authorized for the sonar activity. "Had NMFS applied the correct sonar sound levels when issuing the IHAs, the number of takes would have been materially greater," Linowes said.

This finding suggests that there has been a complete breakdown in the system designed to protect marine wildlife and protect the North Atlantic right whale from extinction. SRWC has requested emergency action by NMFS and BOEM to address this matter beginning with the immediate revocation of IHAs now active.

The SRWC letter sent to NOAA [can be found at this link](#).

The investigations of SRWC and Rand Acoustics, LLC are featured in the powerful new documentary released by Michael Shellenberger's PUBLIC titled *Thrown to the Wind*. [The film can be viewed at this link](#).

The Save Right Whales Coalition (<https://saverightwhales.org>) is comprised of environmental and community organizations, scientists, and conservationists working to protect the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale and other marine life from the industrialization of our ocean habitat through large-scale offshore wind energy development across the eastern seaboard.

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